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Creel, George

Police commissioner Richard E. Enright replies...

New York

[1921]

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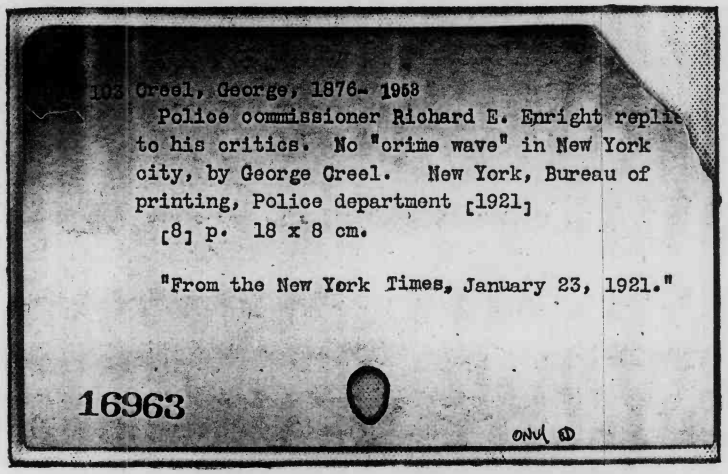
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POLICE COMMISSIONER RICHARD E. ENRIGHT REPLIES TO HIS CRITICS

NO "CRIME WAVE" IN NEW YORK CITY

BY GEORGE CREEL

BUREAU OF PRINTING
POLICE DEPARTMENT
NEW YORK CITY

(*From the New York Times, January 23, 1921.*)

REPLY FROM POLICE HEAD

ENRIGHT ANSWERING CRITICS, SAYS THERE IS NO "CRIME WAVE"—"RESIGN? NOT A CHANCE"

Police Commissioner R. E. Enright, under fire from many quarters, has complained of his inability to gain a fair hearing. THE TIMES asked George Creel to interview the Commissioner. Inasmuch as Mr. Creel was a Police Commissioner of Denver at one time in his career, and has at nearly all times been a storm center himself, it was felt that he could make a full and fair presentation of Mr. Enright's case.

THE Police Commissioner of New York has a fighting jaw, a pair of clear, unwavering eyes and a gift of straightforward talk that makes interviewing a mere matter of faithful transcription. Here is his statement in his own behalf:

"If this gas attack was simply personal in its consequences, I would not care so much, but its poison envelops the whole police force and even the city itself. Ten thousand men are shamed as bad public servants, and New York is held up before the world as an outlaw rendezvous in which there is no respect or safety for life and property. It is the sort of advertising that keeps decent people away, even as it is an invitation to the lawless.

"What makes it worse is that these slanders are opposed by facts at every point. I say to you—and the records prove it—that our police force is loyal, efficient and effective, and that New York is second to no other city in its honest administration of law and the innate orderliness of its citizenship.

"Crime wave? There is none. It's a reportorial phrase without other base than reportorial imagination. Consider the thing for yourself. A terrible war has just shaken the foundations of civilized society, jarring millions of individuals loose from ancient standards. The business of killing and burning and ravaging cannot be carried on for four years without working changes in the old attitude toward life and property, and the whole country is feeling the effects of this demoralization. New York, too, bore almost the full weight of demobilization, industrial and military, and, in addition to our own population of some six million, the city has been the channel for a steady stream from trench and factory—thousands of men and boys, some with too much money, some with too little, and all in the first flush of release from discipline. We have also had to bear the heaviest strain of industrial readjustment. In 1919, for instance, we never had less than 500 strikes, often as many as 800, a majority of them passion breeders of the worst kind.

Complaint Against the Press

"Yet what are the facts and figures? The year 1920—direct inheritor of every war violence and war disintegration—had a crime record well below the crime records of 1916 and 1917, two normal years. Few murders, fewer assaults, fewer burglaries! And did the press, either in 1916 or 1917, cry out against 'the unchecked wave of crime' and warn the world away from New York as a den of iniquity? Oh, no! In those years there was not a Mayor to be hounded nor a Police Commissioner to be discredited.

"There is crime, to be sure, but not in excess of the proportion normal to a city of this size. And as thoroughly and quickly as at any other time in municipal history, criminals are being apprehended. One unsolved murder mystery provokes columns of indignant editorials, but scarce a news item records the scores of successful solutions.

"There is another comparison that can be made in fairness. When I took office in January, 1918,

following an administration that was presumed to have left the city chemically pure, I found forty-three houses of assignation in full blast, and Broadway and its side streets serving as regular trade routes for roving bands of prostitutes. Nine racing bureaus were in active operation, each serving a huge clientele of fools and blacklegs, and gambling was a flourishing industry both in the high place and the low.

"I say that these evil conditions have been wiped out. New York, for its size, is to-day the cleanest and safest city in the world. I challenge any one to circumstantial disproof of this assertion. Let those who have been so glib with their general charges and vague slanders come forward with one single case of protected vice or gambling. There is not a single page in my whole official record that I am not willing to lay on the table before any legal or responsible body. No one can make a specific accusation that I am not willing to answer in the open. But although this attack has been going on for months, not a direct charge of specific wrongdoing or corruption has been made against me, nor can I force my enemies to quit waving their blanket indictment and get down to brass tacks.

Police Force Praised

"Instead of shaming it, New York ought to be proud of its police force. There are scamps on it, and sluggards and tricksters, but man for man they stack up against any body of men in the world for loyalty and devotion. Look at the record again! Less crime in 1920 than in 1916 and 1917. Yet there has not been an addition to the force since 1913. Since that time the city has grown a million, and a World War has manufactured lawlessness, but the same police force that kept the peace in 1913 is called upon to meet the trebled task of to-day. New York contains 314 square miles, with 3,514 miles of streets, and when our men are divided into the eight-hour shifts demanded by law, it will be seen that about 2,000 men must cover this vast area. No other

world metropolis operates with so small a force. London, with police problems far less difficult than ours, has 24,000 policemen. We have 10,500.

"Yet, in spite of the record that proves splendid loyalty, a former police official has not scrupled to charge that the entire force is 'on strike' against me. There's a fine example of unreasoning malice. It was not so long ago that the whole country rose in indignation against the Boston police strike, and yet New York is asked to believe that its 10,000 uniformed guardians are now betraying their trust for no larger reason than hatred of me.

"It would be absurd, were it not so malignant! Police Commissioners come and go—some are liked and some disliked—but out of a lifetime of experience, I can say that there was never a time when the policemen of New York laid down on the job. Not even the army or the navy has greater traditions of devotion. What does take the heart out of them is the newspaper attack that paints them as crooks or loafers.

"In the general mind, the Police Department is associated only with the suppression of crime. As a matter of fact, one might say that this has become almost the least of its duties. We are right arm of the Health Department, of the Fire Department, of the Street Cleaning Department, and of the Election Department. It is the Police Department that examines the steam boilers of the city, it is the Police Department that must handle all parades, and it is the Police Department that has entire charge of traffic, a problem that has become of fundamental importance, and which to-day requires 1,300 men of the 10,500 members of the force. Policemen, in truth, are the clerks and errand boys of almost every other branch of the City Government, and in addition to this, social workers want them to take on other duties ranging from food conservation to wet nursing. It's a wonder to heaven that we get along as well as we do.

"Trouble with the office of the District Attorney? There is none as far as I am concerned. I have

never refused aid to Mr. Swann nor failed to co-operate with his office to the full extent of my power. What I will not do, however, is to give my power of attorney to any other official, nor will I turn over the police for purposes of political huckstering. Back in May, 1918, Assistant District Attorney Smith, who boasts that his genius for publicity placed Mr. Whitman in the Governor's chair, commenced the practice of commandeering the police force for a series of Saturday night raids. Galloping into the police station, heavily flanked by reporters, he would strip the place of all available men, and then hurl himself upon the lesser Broadway restaurants, arresting the patrons joyously and indiscriminately. In the course of a few months, more than fifteen hundred persons were arrested, dragged out, ridden through the streets in patrol wagons and even locked up in cells. Yet not one of this large number ever had a charge made against him, and not one ever faced a magistrate.

"The whole thing seemed outrageous to me. Not only was it demoralizing the police force, and turning station houses into bedlams, but there was also the utter disregard of the very civil rights that we were presumed to protect. I put an end to the business and as long as I am Police Commissioner there will be no more of these hullabaloo dragnets.

Reduction of Costigan

"Why did I take Costigan away from the Vice Squad and reduce him from Inspector to Captain? For the very reason that he wasn't making good. You see, when I took office there was a general belief that my appointment was merely temporary, and some men, Costigan chief among them, felt that no particular loyalty need be given me. He was, and had been, in charge of Vice Squad No. 1, operating in Manhattan, the Bronx and Richmond. Vice Squad No. 2, over in Brooklyn and Queens, was under Inspector McDonald. When I found that houses of assignation, gambling rooms and racing exchanges were in full blast,

I gave orders to Costigan to clean up and clean up hard and quick. In June I called attention officially to his failure. Again in July I pointed out that he and his squad were laying down on the job, and stated flatly that I did not mean to stand for it. I repeated these rebukes and warnings in August, but Costigan still persisted in his attitude of contemptuous indifference, seeming to feel that his press friendships protected him from punishment. In October I relieved him from duty, consolidated the two squads under Inspector McDonald, and from the start we got results. That is the only thing I am after.

"My five Special Deputy Commissioners? All right; let's consider them. For years press and people have been denouncing 'politicians' and begging for 'business men.' I thought it a good idea myself, and so I looked the whole city over and picked out the five biggest executives I could get. Each man took a desk and accepted a distinct set of duties. Dr. John A. Harriss specialized on traffic, Allan A. Ryan took over our co-operation with the Federal Government in the matter of national defense, Edward A. Guggenheim devoted his large experience to the supervision of the Bronx and intricate problems of the Pensions Committees, John M. Shaw took charge of the Borough of Richmond and two committees, Rodman Wanamaker assumed direction of the Police Reserves, General T. Coleman du Pont took hold of the Borough of Queens and Ways and Means Committee, and Dr. Carleton Simon, one of America's foremost alienists, was placed in charge of the Department of Narcotic Drug Control. Had I employed these men in the open market a half million yearly would have been the minimum bill.

"My trouble with the press? Well, the papers are after the Mayor, as you know, and if they can pile enough mud on me, Mr. Hylan is bound to get grimed himself. However, there's a personal element in it that I can't escape and don't want to escape. When I took office I found the representatives of the press at headquarters ex-

ercising a sort of overlordship, claiming rights to all information on the instant, regardless of the evil effects of premature publication, and demanding access to every police record. It was a condition that should never have been permitted, and I ended it. To the press to-day are given the fullest rights in the matter of news, but it is no longer the case that the Police Department is regarded merely as an agency for the manufacture of items. The change aroused bitterness and is responsible for much of the attack upon me. It was a proper order, however, and as long as I am Commissioner it will be enforced. I want the friendship of the press and have the highest regard for the large majority of honest men employed at headquarters, but I do not intend to buy friendship at the price of efficiency or by the surrender of my proper authority.

"Resign? Not a chance. There's no quitting blood in me. I did not ask for this job, but, having accepted it, I do not mean to be scared out of it. As I told you before, there are no secret chapters in my official book. There is not a Grand Jury, nor even any responsible body of the citizenship, that I am unwilling to face, that I am not eager to face. And until specific charges are made, until the defamers of the Police Department file a bill of particulars, I think I have the right to ask the people to give us faith and support."

ENRIGHT'S COMPARATIVE FIGURES

Year	Total	Murder	Felonious Assault	Assault & Robbery	Burglary
1916 . .	14,431	186	3,466	886	9,893
1917 . .	13,141	236	2,591	864	9,450
1920 . .	11,597	*215	2,786	1,145	7,451

Record for the month of December, 1920, as compared with the month of December, 1916 and 1917:

Year	Total	Murder	Felonious Assault	Assault & Robbery	Burglary
1920 . .	1,035	21	199	138	677
1916 . .	1,156	19	228	90	819
1917 . .	1,194	19	163	87	925

*** The 39 persons killed by the Wall Street explosion not included in the figures for 1920.**

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